

Pierce Homestead
3 mi. W of Hillsborough
on NH 31
Hillsborough County
New Hampshire

HABS No. NH-202

HABS
NH,
6-HILL.V.
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

PIERCE HOMESTEAD

HABS No. NH-202

HABS
NH,
6-HILLS
2-

Location: 3 mi. W of Hillsborough on NH 31, Hillsborough County, New Hampshire

Present Owner: State of New Hampshire

Present Occupant: same

Present Use: Historic house museum.

Brief statement of Significance: Home of Governor Benjamin Pierce (1757-1839); Birthplace and early home of Franklin Pierce (1804-1869), 14th. President of the United States. The house is a National Historic Landmark.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and Subsequent Owners: Land owned by Gov. Benjamin Pierce from 1786 to 1839, house built 1804. Gov. Benjamin Pierce to General John McNeil, 1839. Heirs of Gen. John McNeil to Fanny Maria McNeil, 1855. Fanny Maria McNeil to Judge Chandler E. Potter (whom she married in this year), 1856. Fanny McNeil Potter to George H. Stewart, 1870. George H. Stewart to General Samuel Andrews.

In 1917 Mr. Frank P. Carpenter purchased estate and proposed to restore it and give it to the State. Given to State in 1925 as a memorial to Frederick A Kendall.

2. Date of Erection: 1804 /Various secondary sources/

3. Architect: Unknown

4. Builder, Suppliers, etc. Unknown. Moses Eaton is said to have done the wall stenciling /Little, N. F., American Decorative Wall Painting, N.Y., 1952, p. 101; also, program for "Franklin Pierce Inauguration Centennial", July 17-18-19, 1953, Location: N.H.H.S. Lib.7

5. Original Plans, Construction, etc. None known.

6. Notes on alterations and additions: George H. Stewart in 1870 made several changes. He moved one of the barns from across the road to adjoin the house and built a porch on the south and west sides of the house. He removed the lattice summer house and the fence to

the front yard. /Browne, G. W., History of Hillsborough, N. H., Manchester, 1922, Vol. II, p. 456/.

Following remarks taken from Fred Myron Colby's "The Birthplace of a President", Granite Monthly, Nov., 1880, pp. 69-75: The central hall, which formerly extended through the house, had been shortened sometime before 1880. The west parlor had "large chandeliers" and original scenic wallpaper /Bay of Naples pattern, still extant; see: N. McClelland, Historic Wallpapers, Philadelphia, 1924, p. 388/. There are eight rooms on the ground floor of the square part; the second floor with six sleeping chambers all opening on a spacious and airy hall. It had "grounds which in former years were laid out with elegant taste and embellished with fruit trees and shrubbery." On the east, beyond the yard, there is (1880) an enclosed garden of an acre or more, with walks, a summer house, and in the center an artificial pond, now choked with debris and weeds but in the old Governor's time will stocked with trout.

7. Important old views: G. Waldo Browne, History of Hillsborough, N. H., Manchester, N.H., 1921, Vol. I, p. 465. Photograph showing porches, now removed.
8. Further Sources of Information: Baker, Roy, Architect, Architectural Analysis of the Pres. Franklin Pierce Homestead, Typescript and photographic record of the fabric of the house in 1955. Location: N.H.H.S. Library

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure.

The house was the scene of "constant hospitality". Franklin Pierce, 14th President of the United States. spent his boyhood days here. Many leading men of New Hampshire visited here: Isaac Hill, the Athertons, Judge Levi Woodbury, John T. Gilman, Samuel Bell and Governor Steele were more than once guests of Governor Benjamin Pierce. /Browne, History of Hillsborough, Vol II, p. 456; F. M. Colby, "The Birthplace of a President", Granite Monthly, Nov, 1880, pp 69-75/

Prepared by: Charles B. Wood, III
N. H. Historical Soc.
April 1964

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION.

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Four-square, hipped-roof structure with high chimneys and imposing academic door frames, the house is a rural country version of the elegant Portsmouth houses of the previous century. There is throughout it all a note of simplicity and naivete which is not found in the equally elegant houses of more urban locations.
2. Condition of Fabric: Good; well maintained. In-terior of house is at present opened up in various places to gain a more complete picture of the framework and fabric. Extensive restoration is planned for the house in the near future. State funds have been earmarked for this project and the consulting architect will be William G. Perry.

B. Technical Description of Exterior:

1. Overall Dimensions: approximately 40 by 45 feet, main house.
2. Foundations: granite blocks.
3. Wall construction: Vertical stud construction; evenly spaced clapboards with lap joints. Boxed-in sills project out from wall surface.
4. Porches, etc: None on main house. Modern porch on east side of ell to cover well; it is tall and narrow and has an arched door on each of its three sides and a sharp gable roof. Lean-to shed addition added to the rear of the ell; this connects with the barn to the east.
5. Chimneys: Two tall brick stacks with simple banding at the top, symmetrically placed on either side of the central hall. Minor chimney on E wall of ell.
6. Openings:
 1. Doorways and doors. Simplified Tuscan frontispiece with pilasters on bases, architrave, frieze and cornice and triangular pediment. Five-panel door with horizontal transom light of five panes above. Same treatment on east door to main house. Plain doors in ell and rear of main house.

2. Windows and shutters: 12 over 12 double-hung sash on main house. Molded frames surround openings and ogee moldings form "headers" on ground storey windows; tops of second story windows abut the roof cornice. Shutters on south and east sides of main house. 12 over 8 double-hung sash in ell; no shutters. Nine regularly spaced openings on facade.

7. Roof:

1. Shape, covering: Hip roof of low pitch covered with asphalt shingles over wood shingles.
2. Cornice, eaves: Full Tuscan cornice runs around all four sides of main house at eaves level. Cavetto and ovolo moldings break out (project) over the three windows as one. No gutters or leaders.
3. Dormers, cupolas: None.
4. Framing: Inaccessible.

C. Technical Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans: First floor: central hall with stair (hall does not project through to rear wall); parlours to west and east; NW rear corner is bedroom with small alcove to the south (flanks chimney); NE rear corner was originally kitchen with small hall to the south (flanks chimney). This is an entrance hall between front E parlour and kitchen. Second Floor: South room (front of house) is one large space from east to west, it was originally a ball room. 2nd floor rear floor plan same as rear part of first floor. Ell is one large room, a kitchen.
2. Stairways: Stair in central hall; makes two turns. Open string; brackets on step ends in simple sawn profile. Square wood lath balusters, 2 to a tread, heavy turned newel, handrail moulded on one side only. Paneled dado on wall side of stair. Rail ramped but not eased. Second storey newel post projects down through ceiling to form drop or "pendant", an archaic feature.
3. Flooring: painted wide pine boards.
4. Wall and Ceiling finish: Simple base moulding and chair rail; plastered dado and stenciled walls (west parlour contains scenic wall paper). Best stenciling

in ballroom. Plastered ceilings.

5. Doorways and doors. Doors of four equal sized panels with moulded surrounds. Doors into ball room are six paneled.
6. Trim: Rectangular fielded panels over fireplaces; corner posts exposed; no cornice moldings, except in ball room which has ogee and rudimentary frieze of simulated triglyphs. Benches built into walls of ballrm.
7. Hardware: original boxlocks and HL hinges.
8. Lighting: none.
9. Heating: none.

D. Site:

1. Orientation: Facade of house faces south. Pleasant rural setting.
2. Enclosures: Wood fence in "front yard"; composed of six square posts topped by urns between which are vertical wood palings of alternating lengths. Plain wood fence and stone walls enclose remainder of grounds.
3. Outbuildings: Barn connected to ell; moved from across street.
4. Walks, drives, etc: semi-circular drive and parking lot on West side of house.
5. Landscaping, gardens, etc: historical marker stone in front yard. Pleasant grounds but not carefully landscaped.

Prepared by: Charles B. Wood III
New Hampshire Historical
Society
April 1964